

## Essay

Essay originates from the French word "essai" which means "an attempt or endeavor". It was Michael de Montaigne, the acknowledged Father of the Essay, who invented both the word and form in March, 1571 when he wrote the first essay in French. Montaigne designed the essay to communicate an accurate picture of his own mind as it was at the time he was writing it. The original meaning of the word was lost in England during the eighteenth century and it now covers a large variety of writing. (Bachmann, Susan and Melinda Barth.1995.)

Basically the essay is an expression of ideas. It is that type of composition that is essentially meant to explain.

So far, two general types of essay have evolved: the *formal essay* and the *informal essay*. Some essayists try to present the reader with information and keep their own personalities in the background. Such essays are known as *formal essays*. However, the average modern essay bears the imprint of authors' personality. This is known as *informal essay*; the author puts himself on friendly, intimate terms with the reader and confides in him.

Essays vary in style. The style must be appropriate to the content of the essay and consequently, varies as the content varies.

The purpose of the *formal essay* is to give information and instructions. It is impersonal in tone and is addressed primarily in intellect. Its structure gives evidence of great care and it deals with a great variety of serious subjects matters.

The *informal essay* is freer in its method than the formal essay. It is personal in tone and point of view and it is familiar and light in style such as we use in easy, natural conversation and in organized friendly letters. Because of its style, this form of essay reveals the writer's personality, his whims and fancies, sympathies and antipathies, grave and gay moods, etc. At times, the tone might be cheerful or playful even when the subject matter is serious.

An essay is an attempt to exhaust the subject completely, but to make a few important observations. Even a formal, serious essay has this characteristic of informality. The writer suggests certain points to the reader's attention but does not inform him thoroughly. Therefore, if in search of facts alone, the reader should not turn to an essay; but if the reader wishes

to see a subject dealt with in what the author considers its proper proportions, he should turn to the essay.

In modern life, there are many types of essays, which appear daily. Ordinarily, a book of essays is a collection of reprints from newspapers and magazines. The most common form of essay with which we are all familiar with is the newspaper editorial. Usually, such essays are political but not always. More personalized editorials appear in the form of columns written by people whose ideas on current subjects are of interest to a large number of readers.

Articles in good magazines represent another type of the modern essay. Here, the idea is not to present facts but to interpret them and assess their significance.

Book reviews which appear in the better periodicals are forms of essay. A book review which merely presents a summary of the content, however, is not an essay, but one which approaches the book in terms of its general literary significance or one in which the reviewer turns to a creative discussion of his own, is an essay. Reviews of drama can also be essay. Letters may also be classified as essays. ( Navarro, Henry. Interactive Learning Through English. St. Augustine Publications, Inc., 2002. )

The essay as developed by Montaigne was made popular in England in 1603 when the first translation of his essays was published. However, as a literary style, the essay did not take hold in England. Five years after the death of Montaigne, Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626), the Father of the English Essay, published the first ten of his essays. Those first essays were little more than brief notes, only suggestions for more formal essays. Then a volume entitled *Several Discourses by Way of Essays* was published written by Abraham Cowley (1616 - 1667). These essays are much closer in style to Montaigne than Bacon's essays. The great essayists Charles Lamb and Thomas Macaulay paid tribute to Cowley rather than to Bacon as their predecessor in the field. ( Bachmann, Susan and Melinda Barth. Between Worlds: A Reader, A Rhetoric, And Handbook. Harper Collins, 1995. )